

A WOMAN'S QUEST FOR IDENTITY: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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ABSTRACT

Woman is neither biologically nor intellectually inferior to man; but traditionally, in human civilization, she has been treated inferior to man. She has been given the secondary status in the society and is not recognized as a human with an identity of her own. 'Feminism', the anti-patriarchy movement arises and studies the women problems thereby creating awareness. Actions which include feminist literature among others which seek to liberate women from the subordination and exploitation of man and to construct an egalitarian society can be back dated to the 1960s. Shashi Deshpande, a prominent feminist novelist whose novel 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' is analyzed. The objective of this paper portrays the psychological problems that a career oriented woman encounters in her life. The crisis is because of the darkness that persists in one's mind. One must come out of this terror and face the problems boldly with courage. Methodologies such as Simon De Beauvoir criticism is adopted in meeting the objectives. The research will be done in the perspective of feminist theory of Simon De Beauvoir's The Second Sex

KEYWORDS: *Feminism, Patriarchy & Egalitarian Society*

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INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is one of the living energetic women writers in Indian English literature who has published many novels and collections of short stories. Among them are: That long Silence (1988), If I Die Today (1982), Come up and Be Dead (1983), The Dark Holds No Terror (1981). She is a contemporary writer who has given graphic details about women and their psychology. Most of her women characters are able to transcend their crisis identity by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing.

This paper is a study of the novel The Dark Holds No Terror which deals with the problems of a middle class career woman and her marital constraints. It is a reflective of these women who are brought up in traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves from servitude and seek their self-identity and independence. It shows the discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound 'Indian Society'. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a stretched mental predicament and a long drawn introspection. The principal theme of the novel encapsulates the woman's quest for self exploration.

Shashi Deshpande's "The Dark Holds No Terror" is an effectual novel that depicts the life of 'Sarita', a supposedly married lady doctor who escapes to her father's house in the beginning having being tortured by the sexual extremities of her husband, Manohar; but this parental home equally evokes memories of the cruel attitude of her late mother. The novel focuses on the woman's awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a 'person' than as a 'woman' and her wanting to have an independent social image. The Dark Holds No Terror

portrays early Sarita at home where she always tries to control Dhuruva, her brother and the evident disproportionate love of her mother for Dhuruva who resists such controls and shows him more affection served as an agent of jealousy which was revealed when she pushes him from her father's lap when he was barely a year old. Her mother's affection towards her brother impelled her to ask why the mothers carve a female by challenging the old order, the myriad bondages of tradition imposed by a male dominated society. Dhurva's death becomes instrumental in alienating her from them by putting a guilty consciousness which seemed to deal a fatal blow; at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia. This brings the mother-daughter conflict to the forefront. Saru considers economic independence as an insurance against any subordination. When she decides to pursue a course in medicine, her mother is 'traditionally' ill disposed to letting her have her way. She makes efforts at understanding her and even identifies herself with her mother; Valli Roa finds this as "a search for her own feminine side". Finally, we see a 'rebirthing' of her own individuality and personality separate from her mother's.

The word "Feminism" refers to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and an interest in feminine problem. Feminism seeks to liberate woman from the subordination of man and to reconstruct the society in such as to the elimination of patriarchy and a recreation of the culture to fully include all women's desires and purposes.

The strong waves of feminism of 1960s and 1970s are related with woman's discourse. In 1980s, feminism concentrated on transforming the individual fields and in 1990s, began a major role in directing the academic focus on the concerns of the so called "Otherness". Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929) vividly portrays the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood.

The prime objective of the present study is to focus on gender discrimination in Indian society as portrayed in Sashi Deshpande's novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'. The present study is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary source is Sashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and secondary sources are various research articles. Analytical method and descriptive method have been used in the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I have selected Shashi Deshpande's Novel and much of work has been done on it as well as others Indian novels which deal with the same issues. I will relate my novel with all those novels with same themes to enhance the reliability of my research.

In the Research article, "The corrupt Urban Culture in Shobha De's *Sisters*" (2011), Chintan Mahida presents the novel "Sisters" as a typical Indian feminist novel which records the suffering and misery of educated women in a patriarchal society. This type of novel generally includes the growth of a girl in the Indian middle class family with her male siblings to focus on gender discrimination; later on it focuses on the problems of her married life where she is unheard, neglected and oppressed. 'Sisters' deals with the psychic problems of a woman protagonist who is caught up between the conflicts a personal life and a societal life. And finally this crushed volcano of woman protagonist results into liberty, self-awareness and struggle for her place in a patriarchal society.

Surfacing (1972) is a novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood and this deals with the life of an anonymous protagonist who seeks her identity in a patriarchal society. The author actually depicted the exploitation of women and nature by the hand of men. The protagonist goes back to her hometown in search of her lost father. In her journey back to her past through nature she understands the relation between women and nature. In the final part of the novel, the heroine

identifies herself with the natural world. She gains a new identity and refuses to become a victim of patriarchal society. She refuses to go back to the city and gets free from the evil effects of a materialistic and technological world.

Ollala Srinivas presents suffering of Shobha De's Women in the research paper "The image of new women in Shobha De's novel Socialite Evenings." (2009). The novel portrays Mumbai high society and explores the lives of bored rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging in ill-fated, extra-marital affairs, smug selfish husbands, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders. De's women suffer in an androgynous world for they do not cherish genuine passions but only plastic passions. All the women cast off the conventional sense of morality, the old, the tired and repressive sexual move and revel in the erotic celebration of the body. Shobha De has tried her best at expressing the inner urge of the Indian woman whether rural or urban in the best possible way. As a feminist writer, De gives her attention to woman issues in her novel giving them a new approach. The novel 'Socialite Evenings' gives us the picture of marginalization of the Indian women at the hands of their husbands.

Rajeshwar Mittapalli observes Jaya the woman character in the novel. "That long silence" by Shashi Deshpande in the light of exigencies of life presented themselves in the form of traumatic events in his research article, "The Trauma of a House wife: Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence", (1993); Jaya's psychic has not been well-equipped to meet the exigencies. The author further says that as a result, the flood gates of anxiety have been suddenly opened and at this psychological moment irrationality qualified her response to the situation. Her suffering has a beneficial effect on her. It initiates the process of self discovery in her which leads in the last analysis to her new perception of life. She emerges at the end of the ordeal as a woman with certain willingness to compromise with life's problems while earlier she showed a surprising lack of accommodation and expansiveness.

In the research paper "Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows: Articulation of Feminine Voice" (2012) P. Madhurima Reddy attempts to probe into the problem of marriage through Indu, the protagonist and her cousin Mini where one enjoys the freedom of marriage and the other accepts the traditional marriage at the same time, Indu finding her roots in the home and with her husband discovering the meaning of life in her journey to individuation. Shashi Deshpande's Roots and shadows Explore and exposes the struggle of Indu, an educated middle-class woman, in a male-dominated tradition bound society. Indu symbolizes the New Woman, who is educated and who lives in close association with the society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. The novel also deals with the unfulfilled desires and unhappy marriages of women in a large Maharashtrian Brahmin household. It is apparently the story of the triumph and tragedy of a family that is bound up in its conditioned patriarchal self. It tells the story not of an individual but of the institution of marriage, which is threatened by the forces of change and faces dissolution.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Second Sex is a 1949 book by the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir; One of her best-known books. It deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second-wave Feminism.

De Beauvoir's primary thesis is that men fundamentally oppress women by characterizing them, on every level, as the *Other*, defined exclusively in opposition to men. Man occupies the role of the self, or subject; woman is the object, the other. He is essential, absolute, and transcendent. She is inessential, incomplete, and mutilated. He extends out into the world to impose his will on it, whereas woman is doomed to immanence, or inwardness. He creates, acts, invents; she waits

for him to save her. This distinction is the basis of all de Beauvoir's later arguments.

Simon De Beauvoir says that Man and woman are complementary to each other and one is never a whole without the other. Both are considered as two wheels, balancing each other. Neither of them can claim any kind of superiority over the other. Woman is neither biologically nor intellectually inferior to man but, in human civilization, she is valued inferior to man. She has been given the secondary status in the society. Though woman possess the power of endurance, affinity, love and foresight, which contributes to the happiness of others, yet man has always looked down upon her as a weaker sex, as his property and as an object of pleasure.

ANALYSIS

The Dark Holds No Terrors is about the struggles of the Indian women and how they are being oppressed in a patriarchal Indian society. The protagonist is a female character named Sarita and encapsulates the main theme in her search for Self-Identity and liberation. "Sarita's expedition is one of a transition from self-pity to self-revelation, from denial to assertion, from fragility to confidence. She learns to trust in herself."

The novel expresses the dilemma of a woman who grudges on the assault on her individuality and identity. The novel begins with the returning of Sarita to her father's house after fifteen years. Her marital disorder drives her to a drawback time for somber reflection on her relationship status with her husband. Though she remains unchanged till the end, she has a better understanding of herself and others. And she gains wholeness.

Since her childhood, Sarita faced gender-based discrimination not in society but even in her own home. She grows up as a victim of her Sexist prejudice. Right from the start, she was made to feel that she is a girl and is inferior to her brother, Dhruva. She always faced negligence and hatred. She recalls: "The evening... My birthdays were almost the same... but there was no Puja. There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday." (P. 168-169)

She has been told and taught to rear a girl in a particular fashion, and she does it with implicit faith. She suffers the bullying and curtailment of activities, by the mother... She recollects:

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

and Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (P. 45)

The socio-cultural conditioning of a girl is still a part of Indian culture. Saru is always made to feel unwanted, undesirable and ugly. According to her mother, 'physical beauty is a pre-condition of worldly success for a girl'. She constantly criticizes Saru's appearance. "I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so." (P. 61).

Saru's hatred strengthened when she attains puberty. She starts hating everything. She hates the traditional practice in her orthodox home where she is always treated like an outcast. Thus she brought in a patriarchal society and this leads to psychological insecurity in her. She starts to express her feelings through the acts of disobedience which springs from her hatred for her mother as a young girl and as a child. She dreams for a miracle to happen and that one day she would grow up and be independent. But when she grows up she feels shameful because of more restrictions.

"Perhaps there is something in the male, she now thought, that it whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. It is not so with a female. She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve as if there is something in her that prevents erosion and self- destruction." (P. 85).

Saru's conflict with her mother reaches its peak when she decides to marry Manu, who is from lower caste and Saru's mother reject him. As she says:

"What caste is he?"

I don't know.

A Brahmin?

Of course not.

Then, cruelly...his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?" (P. 98)

Saru got married to Manu and she feels that everything will be fine and she will live happily ever after. But this didn't happen. Things started to change when Sarita becomes a doctor. She becomes independent and more confident of herself. This profession has lifted her up a little bit in her comparison to her husband Manohar and gradually Saru comes to know that Manu is also like other men of this patriarchal society and she gets problems in her marriage life

In a patriarchal society, whoever a wife is or whatever a wife does, she has to follow certain rules which are compulsory in society. But the relationship between Sarita and Manohar is significantly different from the conventional perspectives of the society. Sarita becomes more aware of her individuality and her rights and place in a society.

Sashi Deshpande has analyzed that how women are suppressed in a patriarchal society and how society has made rigid rules for them. The novelist has observed the realities of a society which are unacceptable for a lady like Sarita. Sarita writes to the young students like:

"A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3". If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. (P. 137)

These lines have greater significance in relation to the determination of the identity of a woman in the society. Women are nothing but 'Others'. And they are suppressed and oppressed in every way. The key to marriage is the ability to endure and go on. But there are many marriages where women are dominated by their husbands and do not find freedom and "space" in their marital life. Her success as a well known and successful doctor becomes the cause of tensions in her married life. In a nostalgic mood she says later: "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (P. 42)

With the steady rise in Saru's status her husband starts feeling uncomfortable and humiliated when people pay more attention to Saru. As compared to Saru's rise in social status Manu status is of an underpaid lecturer and this causes a great deal of trouble and tensions in their marital life. Saru is more committed to her career as compared to her family. It seems like she wants to make a place of her own in this society. She wants to achieve fulfillment and wholeness in her life. For women, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment- autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted.

Gradually Manu starts hating all this. And he starts teasing and bullying Saru. Certain incidents intensified the tensions in their married life to such extent that in the privacy of their room at night Manu doesn't behave like a husband but a rapist. In order to assert his manhood and masculinity he starts abusing her at nights, though during days he is still that normal and happy Manu. And here Saru feels that she is so helpless and she can't defend herself. As she says to her father: "I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry, I was so afraid that the children in next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure." (P.201).

Although Saru has achieved economic independence and she feels that she is free but now she starts seeing the true and bitter face of her life that no matter how successful she as a doctor is, she is like all other women who are always oppressed by their husbands. During these days she hears the news of her mother's death and she returns back to her home and there she get a chance to spend time with herself and think about everything. She blames herself for everything and deep down inside she accepts everything. "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood." (P.217)

At the end the reader sees a new Saru who rejects extremes and takes a practical and realistic view of circumstances.

"My life is my own –somehow, she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been puppet, it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging unto the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of providing my mother right" (P.220).

CONCLUSIONS

Through her novel, Shashi Deshpande tries to depict feminine sensibility. In general life women want to get liberation and freedom in all its approaches, just like men. Women want their rights and identity. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles-as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. Shashi Deshpande's novel explores the problems of women illiteracy, ideological training in patriarchal societal structures, then the problem of dowry, the complication of the issue of caste and financial status. Saru is a 'New Woman', who is educated, intellectual and financially independent; she could not allow her destiny as an outcome written on her forehead.

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